

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 COLOMB 01480 311307Z  
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-04 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10  
NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 SP-02 OPR-02 SY-05 PM-05  
NSC-05 SS-15 /066 W  
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R 311045Z MAR 78  
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9952  
INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
AMCONSUL MADRAS

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E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: PINT, CE

SUBJ: UNIVERSITY UNREST CONTINUES

REF: COLOMBO 1249

1. DURING THE WEEK OF MARCH 26, STUDENTS CONTINUED TO BOYCOTT LECTURES AT MOST CAMPUSES. POLICE SWEEPED THE COLOMBO CAMPUS ON ORDERS FROM GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES EARLY MORNING MARCH 29. WHILE THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION CLAIMED POLICE HAD DISCOVERED "ENOUGH ARMS AND EXPLOSIVES TO START A WAR", THE PRESS REPORTED, AND A POLICE OFFICIAL CONFIRMED TO AN EMBASSY OFFICER, THAT ONLY POSTERS, PLACARDS, AND A FEW SLEEPING STUDENTS WERE FOUND. UNSPECIFIED OUTSIDERS REPORTEDLY HAVE BEEN THREATENING STUDENTS ON CAMPUS AND THE COLOMBO CAMPUS STUDENT COUNCIL HAS REQUESTED STUDENTS TO LEAVE FOR THEIR HOMES, CLAIMING THAT THE SITUATION IS UNSAFE.

2. CURRENTLY ONLY PERADENIYA CAMPUS HAS BEEN CLOSED. THE AESTHETIC INSTITUTE IS SCHEDULED TO CLOSE MARCH 31 FOR VACATION. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF KATUBEDDA AND JAFFNA CAMPUSES  
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PAGE 02 COLOMB 01480 311307Z

WHERE THERE HAVE BEEN NO INCIDENTS, OTHER CAMPUSES REMAIN OPEN BUT NO LECTURES ARE BEING HELD. ALL CAMPUSES WILL BE CLOSED FOR VACATION BEFORE APRIL 10, PRIOR TO THE SINHALESE AND TAMIL NEW YEAR.

3. A LOCAL OBSERVER WHO FOLLOWS STUDENT AFFAIRS CLOSELY SEES THE CRISIS ON CAMPUSES AS NO LONGER ISOLATED TO STUDENTS

BUT AS A CONGRUENCE OF STUDENT, LABOR, AND TEACHER DISSATISFACTION WITH GOVERNMENT EDUCATIONAL AND LABOR POLICIES. STUDENTS, WORKERS, AND TEACHERS HAVE BEEN COMING OUT IN SUPPORT OF EACH OTHER'S DEMANDS OVER THE PAST TWO WEEKS. THERE ARE UNCONFIRMED REPORTS OF COORDINATION AMONG THE THREE GROUPS. THE INTER-UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FEDERATION AND THE CAMPUS STUDENT COUNCILS ARE DOMINATED BY THE LEFT, AS ARE THE FEDERATION OF TEACHERS TRADE UNIONS AND THE BROAD FRONT OF TRADE UNION FEDERATION, AND ALL HAVE BEEN EXPRESSING INTERLOCKING GRIEVANCES AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. LEADERS OF THE THREE GROUPS REPORTEDLY ARE SCHEDULED TO MEET IN COLOMBO ON APRIL 4 TO DECIDE ON A GENERAL STRIKE.

4. IF REPORTS OF COORDINATION AMONG STUDENT, TEACHER, AND LABOR GROUPS ARE CORRECT, THE UNIVERSITY UNREST MAY CONTINUE FOR SOME TIME, EVEN THOUGH THE GOVERNMENT WILL PROBABLY HAVE SOME RESPITE UNTIL CAMPUSES REOPEN IN EARLY MAY. HOWEVER, THE DEGREE OF SUPPORT FOR LEFTIST DOMINATED STUDENT COUNCILS AND THE INTER-UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FEDERATION IS UNCLEAR. STUDENT SUPPORTERS OF THE GOVERNING UNITED NATIONAL PARTY (UNP) HAVE REPORTEDLY INCREASED ON CAMPUSES SINCE LAST YEAR'S ELECTION. THERE IS SOME FEELING TOO THAT TENSION AND UNREST AMONG MAJORITY OF STUDENTS AT THE MOMENT IS OVER WHAT THEY FEEL ARE LEGITIMATE GRIEVANCES AGAINST THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM, CAMPUS ADMINISTRATION, AND OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE ON CAMPUS AND NOT OVER WANTING TO ACHIEVE SOME POLITICAL OBJECTIVE.  
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PAGE 03 COLOMB 01480 311307Z

5. THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN SILENT ON UNIVERSITY STUDENT COMPLAINTS OVER THE PAST TWO WEEKS. UPCOMING VACATION MAY DEFUSE SITUATION TEMPORARILY, BUT THE GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE TO START A DIALOGUE WITH CAMPUS AUTHORITIES AND STUDENTS IF IT HOPES TO CONTAIN GROWING STUDENT UNREST.  
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## Message Attributes

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**Concepts:** UNIVERSITIES, STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS  
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**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
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**Review Markings:**  
Sheryl P. Walter  
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